

be Director of United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, Department of Homeland Security.

Mitch McConnell, Chuck Grassley, Mike Crapo, John Cornyn, John McCain, Pat Roberts, Steve Daines, Roger F. Wicker, Mike Lee, John Boozman, Lindsey Graham, James M. Inhofe, Cory Gardner, Jeff Flake, John Thune, John Barrasso, Orrin G. Hatch.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. By unanimous consent, the mandatory quorum call has been waived.

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the nomination of Lee Francis Cissna, of Maryland, to be Director of United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, Department of Homeland Security, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Mississippi (Mr. COCHRAN) and the Senator from Nevada (Mr. HELLER).

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Nevada (Ms. CORTEZ MASTO) is necessarily absent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SULLIVAN). Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 54, nays 43, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 214 Ex.]

YEAS—54

Alexander	Flake	Murkowski
Barrasso	Gardner	Paul
Blunt	Graham	Perdue
Boozman	Grassley	Portman
Burr	Hatch	Risch
Capito	Heitkamp	Roberts
Cassidy	Hoeven	Rounds
Collins	Inhofe	Rubio
Corker	Isakson	Sasse
Cornyn	Johnson	Scott
Cotton	Kennedy	Shelby
Crapo	Lankford	Strange
Cruz	Lee	Sullivan
Daines	Manchin	Thune
Donnelly	McCain	Tillis
Enzi	McCaskey	Toomey
Ernst	McConnell	Wicker
Fischer	Moran	Young

NAYS—43

Baldwin	Harris	Reed
Bennet	Hassan	Sanders
Blumenthal	Heinrich	Schatz
Booker	Hirono	Schumer
Brown	Kaine	Shaheen
Cantwell	King	Stabenow
Cardin	Klobuchar	Tester
Carper	Leahy	Udall
Casey	Markey	Van Hollen
Coons	Menendez	Warner
Duckworth	Merkley	Warren
Durbin	Murphy	Whitehouse
Feinstein	Murray	Wyden
Franken	Nelson	
Gillibrand	Peters	

NOT VOTING—3

Cochran	Cortez Masto	Heller
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The PRESIDING OFFICER. On this vote, the yeas are 54, the nays are 43.

The motion is agreed to.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The bill clerk read the nomination of Lee Francis Cissna, of Maryland, to be

Director of United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, Department of Homeland Security.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Cissna nomination?

Mr. WICKER. Mr. President, I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Mississippi (Mr. COCHRAN) and the Senator from Nevada (Mr. HELLER).

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Nevada (Ms. CORTEZ MASTO) is necessarily absent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 54, nays 43, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 215 Ex.]

YEAS—54

Alexander	Flake	Murkowski
Barrasso	Gardner	Paul
Blunt	Graham	Perdue
Boozman	Grassley	Portman
Burr	Hatch	Risch
Capito	Heitkamp	Roberts
Cassidy	Hoeven	Rounds
Collins	Inhofe	Rubio
Corker	Isakson	Sasse
Cornyn	Johnson	Scott
Cotton	Kennedy	Shelby
Crapo	Lankford	Strange
Cruz	Lee	Sullivan
Daines	Manchin	Thune
Donnelly	McCain	Tillis
Enzi	McCaskey	Toomey
Ernst	McConnell	Wicker
Fischer	Moran	Young

NAYS—43

Baldwin	Harris	Reed
Bennet	Hassan	Sanders
Blumenthal	Heinrich	Schatz
Booker	Hirono	Schumer
Brown	Kaine	Shaheen
Cantwell	King	Stabenow
Cardin	Klobuchar	Tester
Carper	Leahy	Udall
Casey	Markey	Van Hollen
Coons	Menendez	Warner
Duckworth	Merkley	Warren
Durbin	Murphy	Whitehouse
Feinstein	Murray	Wyden
Franken	Nelson	
Gillibrand	Peters	

NOT VOTING—3

Cochran	Cortez Masto	Heller
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The nomination was confirmed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the motion to reconsider is considered made and laid upon the table and the President will be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senate will resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of Callista L. Gingrich, of Virginia, to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the Holy See.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority whip.

TAX REFORM

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, not too long ago—I believe this was 2011—a President came to a joint session of Congress and before the American people, he said what needed to be said about our Tax Code. He was pretty blunt. He said that our Tax Code is “rigged.” He said: “It makes no sense, and it has to change.” Of course, you can imagine, that was met with bipartisan applause in the House Chamber and across the country.

The same President called on Democrats and Republicans to “simplify the system, get rid of the loopholes, and . . . lower the corporate tax rate”—one that, I might add, ranks among the highest in the industrialized world.

That President, like the rest of us, knows that our business tax rate is a self-inflicted economic wound because businesses figure out, How can I move money offshore and my headquarters offshore, and if I earn money overseas, how can I avoid bringing that back to the United States for better wages and more jobs and to build the business? That is all because of our self-destructive Tax Code.

But the President's name—and I gave it away by saying the year the speech was given. The President's name might surprise you, given the nature of the current debate in Washington. It was Barack Obama who said that, and the straight talk came from his 2011 State of the Union address.

Let's fast forward a few years. We have a new President from a different party beating the same drum. President Trump has called our Tax Code a relic and a colossal barrier standing in the way of America's economic comeback. He is right, of course, but so was President Obama.

Tax reform doesn't have to be partisan. In fact, it shouldn't be because the ramifications are much more important than just the politics and the scorekeeping of the day. The job creators in my State of Texas are the ones who really understand what is at stake because they are living it. They are the ones who are getting slammed by our current system.

Take Lisa Fullerton, for example, who owns a small retail business in San Antonio, my hometown. Ms. Fullerton is an accountant with 33 years of experience, who used to handle her own business's tax compliance in-house. Eventually, though, the code became too complex, and enforcement became too punitive, and she couldn't take that risk anymore. She said that her outsourcing of tax and employment functions now costs her small business roughly \$280,000 more per year than it did in 2000.

Lisa is far from the only one who is frustrated. Kurt Summers is the President of Austin Generator Service, a small residential power company in the Texas capital. For him, a lower tax rate would mean the difference between his company turning a profit or

a loss. It would literally make the difference between being able to keep the doors open or have to lock them up permanently. He explained that any extra profits realized through tax savings might enable his company to grow more aggressively. To him, the need for change is very simple. It means more hiring and more jobs.

So Texans, like Alaskans and like all Americans, get the picture. But the picture is pretty messed up, and it doesn't make any sense.

Greg Brown, President of W.W. Cannon, an industrialized storage company in Dallas, says that compliance has gotten to be a truly herculean tax. It has gotten so difficult that he has had to outsource that to a CPA—again, because it is so complex and people don't want to risk the burden of not doing it right because of the punitive nature of the penalties.

Darryl Lyons, CEO of PAX Financial Group, has done the same thing. He is harmed each year by the passthrough taxes on his small business income, which impair his ability to save for business emergencies, as well as to pay off his company debt.

Lastly, in terms of my stories here, Andy Ellard, the owner and general manager of a machine company in Dallas, regularly purchases expensive computer numerical controlled equipment to stay competitive in his industry. I have no idea what that is—computer numerical controlled equipment. He said that the tax ramifications of every purchase have to be considered. Almost every day, he asks: Can we expense it? Do we have to depreciate it? And if we do, over how long?

Mr. Ellard isn't shy with his words. He calls the complicated deduction scheme for business expenses "chaos."

Clearly, something needs to change. As I said at the outset, that has been acknowledged on a bipartisan basis by the current President and the past President. I even brought out some quotes yesterday or the day before from the Democratic leader, Senator SCHUMER, making exactly the same argument. The ranking member of the Senate Finance Committee, the Senator from Oregon, said that lowering the corporate tax rate will make America more competitive globally and will bring money back home for jobs and investment in our country. So it is important for us to be consistent and, unfortunately, they haven't been.

Things are starting to change. Last week, the so-called Big 6—led by Speaker RYAN; Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin; KEVIN BRADY, chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee; and the Finance Committee chairman, ORRIN HATCH—released a unified framework that contains core principles for reform. Among them are a simplified rate structure, the elimination of the alternative minimum tax, and many itemized deductions and incentives for companies to keep jobs on American soil. Perhaps most importantly, the framework rec-

ommends what is widely agreed upon as overdue, which is lowering our uncompetitive corporate rate, which puts American employers and workers at a disadvantage.

Today, it is sad but true that we are divided on many issues in America. But as President Trump and President Obama have suggested, tax reform does not have to be one of them.

I listened to our friend the Democratic leader, Senator SCHUMER, this morning, calling for bipartisan tax reform. They are going to have a chance to do that because, after we pass a budget resolution, I anticipate that in the Senate Finance Committee, Senator HATCH will call up a base bill known as the chairman's mark, which will be open for amendment in the Senate Finance Committee. That is what people have been asking for, a chance to participate in the writing of the legislation in the committee and then to have it come to the floor for open debate and amendment. It is what we call regular order around here. But what I am hearing from our Democratic colleagues is, yes, they want bipartisan legislation, but they don't want to participate in the process of writing. It strikes me as pretty hypocritical. This shouldn't be partisan, as President Obama and President Trump have demonstrated and as Democrats and Republicans alike have said time and again.

We in Washington have no magic wand that will make our Tax Code suddenly disappear, but that doesn't excuse us from working to make taxes and tax compliance a little less painful.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Colorado.

LAS VEGAS MASS SHOOTING

Mr. BENNET. Mr. President, last weekend a man camped out on the 32nd floor of the Mandalay Bay Hotel in Las Vegas. He stockpiled 23 weapons and hundreds of rounds of ammunition. He set up bipods and scopes. He brought a hammer to knock out the window. Then, on Sunday, he opened fire. He kept firing for 15 minutes, stopping only to reload and switch weapons. Over 15 minutes, he murdered 58 Americans and injured more than 500.

The day after the shooting, I was in Washington. I had seven or eight meetings, and not a single person in those meetings brought up the worst shooting in modern American history—not one.

I am not sure if it was two mass shootings ago or three when we started to accept this as a normal condition of American life, when we lost our belief that it was within our power to protect our fellow Americans at a country music concert or at a nightclub or at a movie theater or at a school.

I know there are strong beliefs about guns in America—principled beliefs—but there are also steps that the overwhelming majority of Americans want us to take. There are 90 percent of

Americans who think we need background checks for every gun sale, including 74 percent of NRA members. There are 89 percent of Americans who think we should prevent the mentally ill from purchasing guns. There are 82 percent of Republicans who want us to bar gun purchases for people on the no-fly or terrorist watch list. Yet Congress has done nothing to respond to the American people. We did nothing after Aurora, after Newtown, after Orlando—nothing.

Unlike Washington, in Colorado, after the two mass shootings in Aurora and at Columbine, our legislators rose to the occasion and made tough choices after we suffered two of the worst mass shootings in our Nation's history. After the massacre at Columbine, we closed the gun show loophole. After the tragedy in Aurora, we strengthened our background checks in a Western State. Last year, those background checks blocked 8,704 people from buying guns. That may sound like a lot, but 380,000 people applied for guns in Colorado last year. That means just 2 percent of those folks who applied were blocked and that 98 percent were able to buy guns without a problem.

Who were the 2 percent whom Colorado is blocking but whom this Congress fails to block? Among them were murderers and rapists and kidnappers and domestic abusers.

No one could come to this floor and tell me Colorado is worse off because we have kept guns out of the hands of those people. The average wait time for those background checks is 12 minutes. That strikes me as a fair tradeoff to keep guns out of the hands of murderers and kidnappers and rapists. Yet here in Washington, despite now an annual tragedy—tragedy after tragedy—Congress has done nothing. We haven't even done the simple things like close the gun show loophole or stop people on the terrorist watch list from buying weapons.

This is not about taking guns away from people who have them. It is about keeping guns out of the hands of people who nearly everybody agrees should not have them. It is about stopping more people like the Las Vegas killer from modifying his rifles to become almost fully automatic and far more deadly. I cosponsored a bill this week to ban those modifications, and I am encouraged that some of my Republican colleagues seem to be open to that idea.

I know we cannot stop every madman or every random act of violence in this country—we cannot—just as we cannot stop every murder from happening, but that does not mean we should not make them less likely or that we cannot take steps to limit their harm, steps that are backed by the overwhelming majority of Americans and that are fully consistent with the Constitution.

I remember, after the shooting at the Pulse Nightclub, I was supposed to take my daughter to camp that day.

She was going to be away from us for a month. I can remember I did everything I could to keep her from hearing the news that day, as the numbers of fatalities increased during the course of the day, because I didn't want her to leave us—she was about 12 at the time—with a sense of fear, the fear I felt and the country felt. I am so sorry my children and America's children have to grow up in a country where mass shootings are common, where we are beginning to see them just as part of our lives.

I heard somebody the other day on television say that is the price of freedom. What a shame that somebody would say that in the United States of America. What a surrender that represents to our children and to the victims of these crimes. I didn't grow up in that America, but conditions have changed. We have let it happen. The result is, we now have an entire generation of Americans—of our countrymen, our sons, and our daughters—who are growing up with a reasonable fear that they could be victims of a mass shooting or that their moms or their dads might not come home one day.

I think our kids have enough to worry about. They have every right to see a movie with their parents, to go dancing with their friends, or to see a concert on their one night off without having the fear of being shot down by people who have no business carrying such powerful weapons. They have a right to expect that this Congress will finally do something about gun violence in our country—violence which is far greater than anywhere else in the industrialized world.

In the wake of these horrific acts, as always, Americans spring into action. First responders secure the area and care for the wounded. Neighbors hold vigils to honor the victims and support grieving families. Journalists shed light on what happened and why. Citizens speak out to demand action from their elected officials. They are doing their jobs, and it is time for Congress to do ours.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. FISCHER). The Senator from West Virginia.

TAX REFORM

Mrs. CAPITO. Madam President, last week, I rose to talk about the importance of tax reform. I believe this is a policy issue we cannot talk about enough and that we cannot emphasize enough. So, today, I rise to talk about how important the reform is to our small businesses, and in the coming weeks, I will be up here to talk about other important aspects of tax reform.

We are all from different States and other parts of the country, but we all know small businesses are a major economic driver in our country, as 95 percent of businesses in the United States are small businesses, and that number is even higher in my State of West Virginia. Small businesses employ more than half of West Virginia's workforce.

Yet our small businesses face a marginal tax rate as high as 39.6 percent. At the same time, their effective tax rate can vary widely. In fact, a CNBC survey showed that 22 percent of small businesses cannot really say what their effective tax rate really is.

Think about that.

If you are a small business that is a partnership or an LLC, then your profits are going to pass through to you and be taxed at the individual rate. There are currently seven individual tax brackets. Then you have credits and deductions. There is also a self-employment tax, and the list goes on. On top of that, small businesses can have Social Security and Medicare taxes, a Federal unemployment tax, and employment taxes. That is not even taking into account taxes like a State-level income tax or property tax and more. That is why businesses and individuals spend billions of dollars a year to comply with the Tax Code. That is more than 18 hours for every man and woman and child in the United States of America. If I could give a visual here, that is basically 3 million people working full time on taxes for small businesses at a cost of \$195 billion.

The point is, it is complicated. Our Tax Code is too complicated, and that is part of what tax reform is about—simplifying the Tax Code. If Congress can simplify the Tax Code just to cut compliance costs in half, think of how many significant resources that would free up that would be better used to grow the economy, create jobs, raise wages, and expand businesses.

The National Federation of Independent Business, which represents 325,000 small businesses across this country, called this tax reform framework a good start, and it has urged us to take swift action. According to a survey by Paychex, 41 percent of small business owners want tax reform to be the very top priority.

Whom will these reforms really help? We are going to have a long discussion on this. This is just part of whom they will help. They will help the small businesses that employ so many people in my home State of West Virginia. They will help people like Eric Hott, of EH Chocolates & More, from Hampshire County. Eric has a great story. Eric grew up on a farm in Kirby, WV. His mother was from Hornberg, Germany. While growing up, his grandmother was always cooking something. After graduating from high school, Eric moved to Germany to begin a culinary apprenticeship. By 2006, he had a chef apprenticeship at a five-star hotel in Germany. He went on to serve at events like the G8 Summit and for guests that included the German Chancellor and his First Lady. After running a patisserie in Germany, he moved to Switzerland, where he refined and perfected the art of chocolate-making. That sounds good to me. Then what did he do? He wanted to come home. He returned home to West Virginia. He went back to Kirby, WV, and started his own

small businesses—first EH Chocolates & More and, later, Farm Fresh Produce. Both are growing and delicious businesses.

Small businesses employ middle-class Americans who power this and other small businesses across the country. We need more folks like Eric—lots more—who are willing to take the risk, who have a good idea, and who want to stay and work in their own homes in rural America and certainly in our State of West Virginia, which has had a major economic downturn. We need more Eric Hotts. We need to simplify the Tax Code for small businesses and let them focus on what they do best, which is refining their products, providing their services, and providing jobs for people in their various areas.

As much as any other policy that Congress can advance, tax reform will promote growth and provide job opportunities across this great country. Across the entire country, only two in five distressed communities have seen any job growth during the past 5 years. Fully 50 percent of U.S. job growth has occurred in just 2 percent of our country's counties.

We need to change that. We need to help small businesses that are major economic drivers in every part of our country. It is no wonder that small businesses have found it difficult to open, let alone succeed in many parts of our country. Because of our outdated Tax Code, real wages for most workers have barely increased for decades. By modernizing our Tax Code, we can create more opportunity and higher wages for Americans. We can achieve a simpler system with lower rates that is good for business and workers and, from the description I just put forward, would be a good time saver and resource saver.

The best thing about this in terms of small business is that it would lead to more jobs. Let's create an environment that leads to more investment in our States and continues to grow and build jobs. These are the changes hard-working West Virginians and Americans are hungering for. In order to make West Virginia the best place to live and work, now is the time for tax reform.

I look forward to working with my colleagues to make this a reality. Doing it will benefit so many—everyone in this country.

I thank the Presiding Officer and yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona.

(The remarks of Mr. FLAKE pertaining to the introduction of S. 1937 are printed in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

Mr. FLAKE. I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. LEE. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

REMEMBERING ELDER ROBERT D. HALES

Mr. LEE. Madam President, I rise today to honor the life of Elder Robert D. Hales, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Elder Hales passed away peacefully on Sunday, October 1, at the age of 85. He leaves behind his faithful wife Mary and their two sons, Stephen and David.

Robert Hales was born and raised in a faithful household in Long Island, NY. He was an all-American boy who played baseball through college at the University of Utah but eventually traded in his baseball uniform for a flight suit, serving in the U.S. Air Force as a jet fighter pilot. Elder Hales's service as a military aviator would inform the rest of his life and certainly his entire ministry. He took with him the unit motto displayed on the side of his aircraft: "Return With Honor."

After his discharge from the military, Elder Hales entered the world of international business. In jobs around the world, he established a reputation as an enthusiastic leader who relished a challenge and dealt fairly with others. Because of these qualities, Elder Hales rose to become president of Paper Mate, a division of Gillette. Later, he assumed senior executive positions at Max Factor Company, the Hughes Television Network, and Chesebrough-Pond's Manufacturing Company. But Elder Hales never let work dominate his life, as so many executives do. Despite the enormous demands on his time, he stayed faithful to the more important commitments he made to his family and to his Lord.

So it was that Robert Hales, a business executive of international renown, made an unusual decision in the prime of his life: He left the corporate world to give his all to the church. When Jesus said "Come, follow me," Robert Hales left his nets straightaway and became a fisher of men.

Elder Hales was called to become the presiding bishop of the church in 1985, overseeing the church's vast charitable network. As bishop, he used the skills of a business executive not for profit but to help the least of those among us.

In 1994, Elder Hales was sustained to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, a church position he held for 23 years until his passing just days ago. From this position as a watchman on the tower, he boldly proclaimed the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and he also spoke out on such pressing societal issues as religious freedom. He saw that the erosion of religious belief in the United States was quickly devolving into social and political intolerance for religious people and institutions. But this prediction did not lead Elder Hales to despair, no; instead, he redoubled his efforts to edify the next generation—the young men and women who were in the preparatory period of life, as he termed it.

His addresses and sermons were full of moral exhortation and practical advice on living well. Don't walk, run to holiness, he urged his brothers and sisters in faith. Elder Hales knew that holiness is an activity, a pursuit to which we must consecrate our whole lives running the race and enduring to the end.

Through his example and through his words, Elder Hales taught that virtue is not just a good intention but a good deed reinforced and compounded by past deeds.

Elder Hales urged young men and women to embrace the joys of adulthood through marriage, child-rearing, and responsible citizenship. He knew that the way to true happiness lies in those sacrificial activities, not the selfish lifestyles that tempt so many today.

During one memorable address to the General Conference of the church, Elder Hales recounted the advice he received as a boy when he had been tempted to make a poor decision: "Robert," his father had said to him, "straighten up and fly right!" From the testimony of his life, it is clear that Elder Hales honored his father's advice in the Air Force, in the workforce, in the household, and in the church. Elder Robert D. Hales flew right. Now he has returned with honor to be embraced by his Heavenly Father.

Thank you, Madam President.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. LANKFORD. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RUSSIA INVESTIGATION

Mr. LANKFORD. Madam President, I want to be able to give a quick update to this body on a conversation that started yesterday and has been ongoing for months about Russia and their interference in our elections and how they are trying to engage with us in a way that much of Europe has seen for decades but that we just haven't seen in the United States.

Yesterday, Senator BURR and Senator WARNER stood up and gave an update of where we are in the status of the investigation of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. They walked through some of the statistics. We have done over 100 interviews. We have 4,000 pages of transcript from those interviews. We have 100,000 documents that we have gone through so far, and there is more to go. We have completed some areas where we have interviewed everyone who we could possibly interview in that area. In other areas, as we do one interview, they quote a couple of other people, and we chase down those individuals, and it continues. So parts of the inves-

tigation are not done at this point, but some of it is.

Several aspects are clear from the investigation, though, again, it is not complete, and we will have a final document at the end. Some of the areas that are clear are that Russia was trying to use active measures to engage us in our last election. That part is very, very clear.

The question comes for many people: Why would they do that? Quite frankly, this is the way Russia has worked for a very long time—this asymmetric warfare they do where they try to constantly interfere in other people's thoughts and conflicts. They have done it across Europe for a long time. They are now doing it here.

Some of this is a product of Russia's having a very weak economy and trying to find some way to bolster themselves up. In the last 2 years, the Russian ruble has dropped 40 percent in value. As they struggle with low oil prices and struggle in the way they function with their government with the oligarchs and have a select group of people who can succeed and other folks who continue to struggle around the country and as they struggle under that system where they have fake elections and such, they try to reach out to other countries and try to interfere in our elections to make us look like them.

We have a free press that they try to engage in. We have free speech that they don't have in Russia. We have freedom of religion, which they don't have in Russia. We have the ability to be able to have disputes on political issues. They clearly don't have that in Russia. If you disagree with leadership in Russia, you will end up in prison. If you disagree with leadership in the United States, you will end up on TV. It is very different to be in an open society like ours. But they reach into what we consider a strength and try to make it our weakness.

We are going to try to get the facts out on this over the next several months as we work through this process. We are going to expose what Russia is really trying to do. Do they use some overt propaganda networks like Sputnik Radio and RT? Is their Russian propaganda on multiple cable and satellite channels throughout the United States? Their version of the facts are designed to create discord in our Nation. That is what they do.

They also have ways that are not quite as overt. They reach in on social media platforms. They have their trolls in Russia who have thousands of fake accounts on Facebook and Twitter and other social media apps. They use those thousands of apps to search around any news in America and find a place where there is conflict in America and then try to amp up the volume.

To be clear, the Russians are not creating conflict in America. We have plenty of it. We disagree on issues. Again, it is our free society. When we disagree on something, we disagree on

it publically and sometimes loud. That is who we are as Americans. We try to work things out, sometimes at a high volume. But just like two kids who are fighting on the playground in the fifth grade—remember those two kids that started a fight and their friends were watching them? Then, eventually, someone on the other side of the playground started yelling “fight,” and the crowd started forming. The Russians aren’t starting the fight. They aren’t even in the fight. They are the kids on the far side of the playground, trying to get more people to run to the fight. They are not starting the Twitter wars and the battles, but they look at where America is divided, issues like race. Their troll farms will try to find areas where we disagree, such as areas of race, and reach in and try to amplify the volume on that by repeating accusations and by trying to be even more hostile online. They are trying to stoke disunity in our Nation.

It is important that we know that every time you see something with a high number of hashtag counts that goes up, it is not always Americans who are pushing that up. Occasionally, it is an outside body trying to raise the volume and make a conflict look even bigger than it already is in America because they are into sowing discord. That is what they love to do. That is what the rest of the nations have seen them do. We should be very clear that the Russians are trying to continue to sow chaos into us.

They have reached into our election systems. In the previous couple of weeks, the FBI notified 21 different States that during the last election season, the Russians tried to interfere in their election process as a State. Now, that doesn’t mean they did interfere. That means they reached in and tested systems. That means they tried to go into voter databases to see if they could access a voter database to see who was registered to vote. They tried to get into a secretary of State’s office in a local State to see if they could figure out how they do their elections. That means they reached into systems in States to see what voting machines they used and if they tried to connect them in. They were trying to find out how they do elections, learn as much as they could about their process, and see how far they could get.

Through all of our work, we have yet to find a single vote that was changed. The Russians didn’t get into voting machines. They didn’t alter the election in any way, but they were constantly probing through multiple States to see what they could get access to.

Now, it is my belief that they are preparing for something else. They are trying to see what they could get access to in the last election to see if they could get back into it and do even more in the next election. We should be aware of that. We should be aware not only of their propaganda, but we should be aware that they are going

after our elections to see if they can find a way, at the end of the election, to make us doubt the outcomes.

What can we do about that? I will give you several ideas. One of them, I would say, is that we need to protect the primacy of States running the elections. There is absolutely no need for the Federal Government to go to States and take over their election process. It is a constitutional protection that those States have to be able to run their elections, but every State is also responsible to do it. Of the 21 States that I noted here that the Russians tried to engage in, they couldn’t get to a single voting machine. The States are already doing a good job, but they need help.

There is no reason the State of Oklahoma should have to work alone to be able to protect itself from the Russians trying to invade it in the cyber attack. They are going to need some allies to come along with them, but the States should still be able to run the system. There should be more sharing between the State and the Federal Government. There should be an opportunity for the Federal Government to be able to say to a State, earlier than 10 months after the election: Hey, you are being hacked. For the FBI to notify States a couple of weeks ago that they were hacked in the 2016 elections is a little late. When it is occurring, we need to have that engagement between State IT folks and Federal IT folks. We need to be able to have that conversation as it is ongoing so the State can take protective measures as it is occurring. We need to have that cooperation between States and the Federal Government. We need to be able to help States come up with ways they can audit their system after the election is over.

When every election occurs, you should be able to audit it and make sure the machines that were running the election actually were not hacked. You can verify that. In Oklahoma, we have optical scanners. You fill out a paper ballot. You run it through an optical scanner at the end of the election time, and they can count everything from the optical scanner. If there is any question, they can go back to the paper and actually do a hand count. We can literally audit our elections and their process. It is a safe system that we have set up in our State. Every State does it differently, but I would encourage every State to set up a system where they can audit their system.

We know this year that the Russians were trying to engage in our election. It could be someone else who could do it. Any number of groups could try to interfere in our process. It is basic common sense to say we should have a system of elections we can actually audit. Perhaps Russia, in the days ahead, hopes that our Nation will be more like theirs. We will not be.

We are the longest constitutional Republic in the world. We still need the world. We still put out our values about free speech, free press, freedom

of religion, and opportunities for individuals to actually engage and to have conflict with their own government and to be able to disagree publically on things. We still can disagree with each other. We need to be aware that they want to turn us into them. I would hope for the sake of the Russian people, in the days ahead, that they could be more like us.

Ronald Reagan told a story about a friend of his who had a conversation with a Cuban refugee fleeing from communism and oppression in Cuba in 1964. He said that his friend, this Cuban refugee, said:

If we lose freedom here, there is no place to escape to. This is the last stand on Earth.

We are still a role model for the rest of the world. As much conflict as we have with each other, we are still a role model. I have no issue disagreeing at times with people on this floor. We can have our disagreements, but I don’t want the Russians to interfere in our disagreements. They can keep their business over there. In the days ahead, we will continue to expose the things they are doing. So they can back off and go bug someone else because we are akin to what they are doing.

With that, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BROWN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Ohio.

EQUIFAX BREACH

Mr. BROWN. Madam President, I say to the Presiding Officer—and the Senator who is about to become the Presiding Officer—I appreciated the work of you two together, in tandem, today for two nominees in front of the Agriculture Committee. I thank you.

(Mr. SASSE assumed the Chair.)

Mr. President, I rise to talk for a moment about a hearing yesterday, which the Presiding Officer sat through, too, with the outgoing CEO of Equifax. We know what happened with Equifax, yet we really don’t know entirely what happened. We know there was a breach of Equifax’s information, and 145 million Americans—more than half of the adult population in our country—had their data breached. Criminals will now have access to the data of far too many Americans.

I am hopeful because I and Senator CRAPO, the chairman of the committee, and others on the committee were pretty unhappy—not to speak for others, certainly, but we were pretty unhappy with Equifax’s performance yesterday because we didn’t get a lot of answers to a number of our questions.

When you think about what we do with medical language, with our personal medical information, we have laws to say that our personal medical information belongs to us. We, of

course, can share it with a hospital or a doctor or whomever we want, but our doctor can't share it with other doctors without our permission. Our hospital can't share it with other hospitals without our permission. But our personal financial data doesn't fall into those categories.

We know how this happens. Equifax is a company that many have rarely thought about. A lot of people have never thought much about it, and many have never really explored who they are. Equifax is a company in Atlanta. There are three data agencies like this. They get your data without your permission. They get it from a utility company or from a bank or from somebody else. They have two jobs: to collect your data and then to protect your data, your personal financial data.

This company—this CEO has been paid \$69 million over the last 3 years. The CEO we met with, who has retired, has been compensated very generously. Who knows if he will end up getting bonuses and golden parachutes and all? The American public has come to unfortunately expect that these CEOs will abuse the public trust.

Look at what happened at Wells Fargo, creating all kinds of accounts for people who didn't even want those accounts, who didn't even know they were having those accounts opened. And look at Equifax.

In far too many cases, these companies don't protect our information the way they have promised they would. It makes all of us, the 145 million, subject to some kind of criminal activity in all kinds of ways—to violate our privacy and to take advantage of us financially and all the identity theft and all the things that come with that.

If you were a student at Bowling Green State University who graduated and you miss a student loan payment after you have graduated, you get your credit dinged by Equifax. If you are a homeowner in Mansfield, OH, or in Ravenna, OH, and you miss a monthly payment or a couple of monthly payments, you get your credit dinged. You are held accountable by Equifax, but Equifax hasn't really been held accountable much by anyone.

The cynicism people in this country have toward our financial system, toward Wall Street—then we see Wells Fargo do what they have done; then we see Equifax do what they have done. It is time for Congress to push away these special interest groups that have far too much influence in this body.

The White House has not been helpful. The White House looks like a retreat for Goldman Sachs executives, with all the people around the President who do the bidding of Wall Street and protect far too many of these Wall Street firms and Wells Fargo and the Equifaxes of the world.

I am hopeful that we will sit down in a bipartisan way and begin to figure out what to do here. Maybe we do consider the protections we have for peo-

ple's medical records—we ought to have the same protection for their financial records. It simply makes sense, and I am hopeful we can come to a solution.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

PUERTO RICO RECOVERY EFFORT

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, I rise today, as I have on so many occasions, to give voice to the 3.5 million Americans who call Puerto Rico home. Their lives have been turned upside down by Hurricane Maria, and now more than ever, they desperately need to be heard. I invite my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to join me in amplifying the voices of millions of Puerto Ricans calling out for help and the millions here on the mainland who have yet to hear from their families.

Here on the floor with me today are aerial photos of the destruction caused by Hurricane Maria, the astounding damage I saw firsthand when I toured Puerto Rico by helicopter on Friday, pictures largely taken by me.

Take this collapsed bridge in the municipality of Utuado, situated in the central mountains of Puerto Rico. Every day, the 30,000 Americans who live in Utuado depend on these bridges to cross the beautiful rivers that run through it, but today those 30,000 Americans are secluded, waiting in the dark, and wondering when help will arrive.

Images like these have stayed with me from the moment I left Puerto Rico, and I share them today because the people of Puerto Rico need our collective voices and support to stop this humanitarian crisis from devolving into a full-blown American tragedy.

This is another example of some of the devastation of a large number of homes in a community.

If we hope to overcome the monumental challenges before us, we need a full grasp of the reality on the ground. I thought that is why President Trump went to Puerto Rico this week—to get a dose of reality. Instead, the President continued to feed on his own warped version of reality. The President told the people of Puerto Rico that they should be “very proud” that the death count was only “16 versus literally thousands of people” who died in “a real catastrophe like Katrina”—a real catastrophe like Katrina. And certainly that was a catastrophe, but this is no less real for the people of Puerto Rico. Yet, moments later, the AP reported that fatalities in Puerto Rico have tragically risen to 44. And while I pray it is not the case, I fear that it may be even worse, because we have secluded communities that still have not

gotten access, so we don't know what is happening there.

In short, the situation is perilous, and we don't have a moment to waste.

Like many, I had hoped that during his visit to Puerto Rico, the President would take the high road and set a new tone after his administration's woefully delayed and inadequate response to Hurricane Maria. Instead, the President took victim-blaming to a whole new level. He told emergency responders and local elected officials: “I hate to tell you, Puerto Rico, but you have thrown our budget a little out of whack.”

Well, Mr. President, perhaps we have to dial back the budget-bursting, trillion-dollar tax cuts you want to give to billionaire families like yours, because it is going to take more than paper towels to help the people of Puerto Rico.

In this country, we don't turn our backs on Americans in need. We don't complain about how much it costs to restore power to hospitals or rebuild roads in ruin that connect people to their government and essential services or get clean drinking water and food and medicine to the hungry and the frail. We are the United States of America, and we are there for each other, whether it is Texas after Harvey or Florida after Irma or New Jersey after Sandy or Puerto Rico after Maria.

If you heard the President speak earlier this week, you would heard that everything is going great and that he in particular is doing the greatest job any President has ever done in the history of the world. The administration will tell us that the majority of hospitals are open but leave out the fact that many are running on emergency generators at significantly reduced capacity. They will leave out how the shortages of ambulances and fuel and functional roads have made getting to the hospitals nearly impossible. Even if you do find a way there, the hospitals might not have the medicine, supplies, or doctors you need.

The administration will boast that it has set up 11 distribution points for food, water, and other necessities, but what good is a distribution center that takes hours to reach and is out of supplies before you get there?

They will brag about how half of the people have access to running water but neglect to say that in some rural areas in the north, barely over 13 percent of people have access to running water.

They will boast about all of the buildings being inspected—something that even the Governor of Puerto Rico questioned—but look at this image I took 5 days before the President landed. This is just 25 minutes outside of San Juan. Hurricane Maria destroyed many of the wooden homes that populate the island and weakened many of its immense structures, as the picture showed that we had up before. Here is an example of it. So you see that all of

these homes are destroyed. Some of them are not made in the same way. Here is a cement structure that is also totally destroyed. I saw the same sights across Puerto Rico in communities near the capital, in the mountains, and along the coast.

What does all this tell us? It tells us an unfortunate truth: that the administration's response to this crisis has been woefully inadequate from the start.

For 2 weeks, Puerto Ricans cried out for help—help accessing clean water, help powering hospitals, help feeding families. Yet the President accused them—the victims of this historic natural disaster—of being ingrates clamoring for handouts. He dismissed the urgency of their situation, and he effectively called the mayor of San Juan another nasty woman who should pipe down.

Well, this is the mayor of San Juan, wading hip deep in water. Does this look like a woman who isn't taking responsibility? No. To me, it looks like a leader doing everything she can to save lives.

I knew from the start that we weren't getting the full picture, and because the administration went out of its way not to provide support for a bipartisan congressional delegation to visit the island, I decided to go myself. After all, it will be the responsibility of Congress to fund disaster relief and long-term recovery on these islands, and we need the facts in order to produce the right legislation. So last Friday, I boarded an Americans Airlines flight to Puerto Rico.

Now, let me be clear. I have visited the island of Puerto Rico I don't know how many times over the past 25 years, both in my official capacity as a Member of Congress and personally to vacation. It is no exaggeration to say that the island I saw on Friday is not the island I have known and loved. The lush, green, tropical landscape that comes to mind when we think of Puerto Rico was mostly devoid of life.

I met with the Governor of Puerto Rico. I spoke to local law enforcement officials, first responders, and Federal FEMA officials. With the help of the Governor's office and the Puerto Rico Joint Forces of Rapid Action—or FURA, as they are known on the island—I saw the damage by helicopter. I saw debris and mudslides and fallen trees on the inland streets, destroyed homes sprinkled with the occasional yet all-too-familiar blue of FEMA tarps. A dead green hue covered the landscape that was such a foreign sight to me that I caught myself thinking I was somewhere else.

This was an all-too-familiar scene—the scene of a strong cement structure of a building, on the surface impervious to the strong winds of a hurricane, yet now on the verge of sinking into the Earth. The hurricane eroded so much land that in some inner parts of the island, landslides have become the new norm. The people who live here may

never be able to return. Entire generations of close-knit communities may never be the same.

Despite these dire conditions, during my visit to Puerto Rico, I felt the spirit of community and commitments shared by so many Americans across the island. After Hurricane Maria, they woke to devastation, no communication, and the isolating affects of roads being cut off by fallen trees, electrical posts, and debris. As they wait and wonder when their government will come to their aid, they are doing everything they can to survive. They have taken matters into their own hands. They are clearing roads, sheltering relatives who lost their homes, and working together to care for the most vulnerable. So through it all, I saw the hard-working spirit alive in Puerto Rico that I see whenever I speak with Puerto Rican families there and across New Jersey, where so many of my constituents are mobilizing to send help as they anxiously wait to hear from their families.

Like so many Americans, I too worried about my family on the island. My brother faces health challenges, and I worried about his care. Fortunately, we had a brief moment to meet, and I was able to give him some supplies—help one person. But as tough as this situation was, he is one of the lucky ones. He lives in a suburb of San Juan which is relatively better off than the more remote, rural areas.

Let's look at a chart of our recovery status. Fifteen days after the storm ravaged the island, where does it stand? Well, 93 percent of our fellow Americans are still without power. I can tell my colleagues firsthand that the heat and the humidity from all of the water that came from Maria is stifling. It is oppressive. It is hard to breathe.

Sixty percent of Puerto Rico has no cell phone service, meaning people have no way of connecting to their families on the island and outside of the island or calling for help if they needed it. If they did, we could have pinpoint accuracy of search and rescue missions.

Day by day, fewer and fewer Puerto Ricans have access to clean, running water. From October 2 to October 3, the population with running water dropped from 29 percent to 13 percent.

The truth is, this situation would be unacceptable in any major city on the U.S. mainland, but, as the people of Puerto Rico know all too well, they don't get the same treatment as their fellow citizens on the mainland. The ugly truth is that for generations, Congress has treated the people of Puerto Rico not as our fellow Americans, not as people who have fought and bled for their country, like the famous Borinqueneers, an all-Puerto Rican infantry division, who received, recently, the highest decoration Congress gives collectively—the Congressional Gold Medal. They haven't treated them as first-class citizens but as second-class citizens.

Hurricane Maria didn't create this disparity, but it exposed the longstanding inequities that have hindered the island's success for generations. The people of Puerto Rico don't receive equal Medicaid funding, Medicare coverage, or access to tax credits. They aren't just numbers on a ledger; they are long-term care for a grandparent, treatment for a critically ill child, and a fair shot to make a living wage and raise a family.

This didn't happen overnight. These wrongs add up over time. As Governor Rossello said so eloquently:

I invite you to reflect on why Puerto Rico is in the current state of disadvantage and inequality. It's not something that happened just a few months or few weeks before this storm. It is a condition that has happened for more than a century in Puerto Rico.

I invite you to reflect on the reality that even after the storm hit Puerto Rico, even when it was evident it was a disaster in the United States, only half of our U.S. citizens knew Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens. So when Hurricanes Irma and Maria slammed into Puerto Rico, these disparities, these inequalities, were laid bare.

None of this should have taken the Trump administration by surprise. We knew the storm was coming. We knew for days that a category 5 hurricane was on a collision course with Puerto Rico, just as communities across the island were picking up the pieces after Irma. We have known for years about the island's aging infrastructure, like the downed power line pictured here.

In short, all of us knew Hurricane Maria was a recipe for disaster that would leave 3.5 million Americans imperiled, disconnected, and in the dark. It should not have taken the administration 12 days to issue a disaster declaration—something I called for—for 100 percent of the island because, as I saw on Friday, there is no community in Puerto Rico untouched by this tragedy. Focused leadership would have had a three-star general on the ground the moment the clouds parted, not 8 days after the storms struck.

We needed medical evacuation vehicles and vessels, aid and relief delivery systems on standby, the USNS *Comfort* ready for immediate deployment—something I called for. Instead, the administration told us helping Puerto Rico is hard because it is an island in a big ocean—but it happens to be an island of 3.5 million U.S. citizens.

We have no more time to waste. That is why it is so urgent that we take action now. If we could send 20,000 troops to Haiti, surely, we can get more boots on the ground saving American lives in Puerto Rico. We need more helicopters airdropping food and water to secluded communities. We need generators delivered and the repair of communication towers expedited.

It is up to the President to mobilize every resource possible—to save lives, to get the lights turned on, to rebuild bridges, to reach secluded communities, to reconnect families. We can't

afford to waste any more time, not when lives are on the line, not when elderly residents in nursing homes grow frailer by the moment, not when hungry American children have nothing to eat, not when communities are without clean drinking water for days on end. We need to keep the pressure on the administration.

That is why I wrote the President, urging that he activate the Defense Production Act of 1950 so the military could more quickly deliver vast private sector resources to those in need. That is why my colleagues and I wrote to the White House and urged FEMA to waive disaster relief cost sharing because, as the Governor told me: I have no revenue coming in. I have no revenue coming in, and the likelihood of revenue coming in, certainly in the short term, is not there. How do you acquire the 70 or 75 percent Federal assistance if you don't have the 25 percent to put up? That is why we have written the USDA asking that they use all available resources to get food to the people of Puerto Rico.

This is an all-hands-on-deck situation for the Federal Government, but Congress also has a responsibility to act. That is why I sent a letter to Leader MCCONNELL and Speaker RYAN urging that they bring forward an emergency supplemental aid package and fund community development block grants for disaster recovery. It is up to us in Congress to immediately authorize, not just the emergency funding needed to save lives in Puerto Rico but also the assistance needed for a full-powered recovery.

We must give Puerto Ricans the tools to rebuild. That means making sure Puerto Rico's financial control board gives the Governor the flexibility to spearhead this recovery. Board members of that control board should be on the island, assessing the damage, speaking to the survivors, allowing Governor Rossello to create a new budget that reflects Puerto Rico's post-Maria reality. The damage, by some estimates, could be as high as \$90 billion, so adjusting expectations and enabling flexibility is absolutely critical going forward.

I have said it before and I will say it again. The people of Puerto Rico must come before Wall Street creditors. As it turns out, this is one area where the President and I can find common ground. Just last night, he called for Puerto Rico's debt to be wiped out. I hope all of us—the administration, my colleagues in Congress, and the fiscal control board—can work together to jump-start Puerto Rico's recovery. That must include enabling flexibility, addressing the island's crippling debt, and ensuring that pensions are protected and paid. Imagine not getting your pension—no longer working, having no income, and then your pension is not protected. How do you make it? All of us in the Senate have a responsibility to stand with Puerto Rico. How we respond to this crisis will have pro-

found consequences, not just for the Americans who live in Puerto Rico today but for generations to come.

We need to pass a disaster package that matches the astounding damage suffered by the island. The photos I have brought to the floor today give a glimpse—not anywhere near the whole picture—of the devastation on the ground. It is not enough to reconnect a faulty, ailing power grid. It is time to be proactive and rebuild Puerto Rico so it is prepared for the next storm and for the 21st century. It is time to fix the underlying disparities which have hindered Puerto Rico's success. Otherwise, we will simply be rebuilding a broken foundation.

Let me close by saying, I remind my colleagues that Puerto Ricans are not just citizens of the United States—which, in and of itself, should speak to the compelling arguments we should be engaged in helping Puerto Rico as our fellow Americans. They have fought to defend our Nation from World War I to the War on Terror. Take a walk down to the Vietnam Memorial, and you will see Puerto Rican names engraved in that stone far in excess of the number of people proportionately to the American population. Throughout our history, Puerto Ricans have given their lives so they may remain part of the “land of the free.” To this day, more than 10,000 Puerto Ricans serve in every branch of the U.S. Armed Forces.

Let's also remember that beyond the 3.5 million citizens living on the island, there are 5 million Puerto Ricans living in our States, in our congressional districts, and in our communities. In the aftermath of this unprecedented disaster, these Americans deserve the same rights, the same respect, and the same response from their Federal Government. That is what I told leaders from New Jersey's Puerto Rican community earlier this week—assemblymen and women, mayors, community leaders, and concerned citizens.

We all remember how hard it was to secure the funding we needed to rebuild New Jersey in the aftermath of Superstorm Sandy. We had to fight tooth and nail every step of the way, and, guess what, we had two U.S. Senators from New Jersey and 13 Members of Congress, joined by our colleagues from New York—two U.S. Senators from New York and a whole host of congressional Members as well as from Connecticut, which was also affected. It was an incredible time here to try to get relief.

Americans in Puerto Rico have no vote in the Senate, they have no votes in Congress, and the fight to rebuild Puerto Rico will be that much harder, but, as I have in the past, I intend to be their voice and their vote in the U.S. Senate.

Now is not the time to pretend like recovery will be a piece of cake. No one—not the Governor, not the President, not any one of us—should sugarcoat the human catastrophe playing out in Puerto Rico. It is time for hon-

esty about the conditions on the ground, the challenges we face, and the actions we must take.

Yes, Puerto Rico is an island in the middle of a very big ocean, but we are the most powerful nation on the face of the Earth. We have the most advanced military capabilities ever known and the most skilled Armed Forces in the world. We have to be there for 3.5 million Americans who are in need. We are the United States of America. We do the impossible. Give our men and women in uniform any mission, and they rise to the occasion.

If we conducted the Berlin Airlift, set up tactical operations in the mountains of Afghanistan, built green zones in Baghdad in the height of the Iraq war, then surely we can save the lives of Americans in danger, and surely we can save those lives and help rebuild Puerto Rico. We must not rest until every American is safe and the work of rebuilding is done.

I yield the floor.

(At the request of Mr. SCHUMER, the following statement was ordered to be printed in the RECORD.)

● Ms. CORTEZ MASTO. Mr. President, I had expected to be able to vote today on the motion to invoke cloture on the nomination of Callista L. Gingrich to be Ambassador to the Holy See. Instead, I am in Las Vegas meeting with victims of and first responders to the deadliest mass shooting in modern U.S. history.

I support the motion to invoke cloture on the nomination of Callista L. Gingrich to be Ambassador to the Holy See. The U.S. relationship with the Holy See is an important one and is best supported with a confirmed ambassador leading it. Ms. Gingrich's faith and engagement with the Catholic community will support U.S. ties to the Vatican.●

Mr. MENENDEZ. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. ISAKSON. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. ISAKSON. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that all time be yielded back on both sides.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

CLOTURE MOTION

Pursuant to rule XXII, the Chair lays before the Senate the pending cloture motion, which the clerk will state.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Callista L. Gingrich, of Virginia, to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the Holy See.

Mitch McConnell, Bob Corker, Johnny Isakson, Patrick J. Toomey, Richard Burr, Orrin G. Hatch, Roger F. Wicker, Tom Cotton, James Lankford, Pat Roberts, Ron Johnson, Richard C. Shelby, Cory Gardner, John Thune, James E. Risch, Deb Fischer, David Perdue.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. By unanimous consent, the mandatory quorum call has been waived.

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the nomination of Callista L. Gingrich, of Virginia, to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the Holy See, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Mississippi (Mr. COCHRAN), the Senator from Nevada (Mr. HELLER), and the Senator from Arizona (Mr. MCCAIN).

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Nevada (Ms. CORTEZ MASTO) and the Senator from Florida (Mr. NELSON) are necessarily absent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. LEE). Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 75, nays 20, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 216 Ex.]

YEAS—75

Alexander	Fischer	Murkowski
Baldwin	Flake	Murphy
Barrasso	Franken	Murray
Bennet	Gardner	Paul
Blunt	Graham	Perdue
Boozman	Grassley	Portman
Burr	Hatch	Reed
Cantwell	Heinrich	Risch
Capito	Heitkamp	Roberts
Cardin	Hoeven	Rounds
Carper	Inhofe	Rubio
Casey	Isakson	Sasse
Cassidy	Johnson	Schumer
Collins	Kaine	Scott
Coons	Kennedy	Shaheen
Corker	King	Shelby
Cornyn	Klobuchar	Strange
Cotton	Lankford	Sullivan
Crapo	Leahy	Thune
Cruz	Lee	Tillis
Daines	Manchin	Toomey
Donnelly	McCaskill	Warner
Enzi	McConnell	Whitehouse
Ernst	Menendez	Wicker
Feinstein	Moran	Young

NAYS—20

Blumenthal	Hassan	Stabenow
Booker	Hirono	Tester
Brown	Markey	Udall
Duckworth	Merkley	Van Hollen
Durbin	Peters	Warren
Gillibrand	Sanders	Wyden
Harris	Schatz	

NOT VOTING—5

Cochran	Heller	Nelson
Cortez Masto	McCain	

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. FISCHER). On this vote, the yeas are 75, the nays are 20.

The motion is agreed to.

The Senator from North Dakota.

TAX REFORM

Mr. HOEVEN. Madam President, I rise today to talk about what is really a “once in a generation” opportunity, and that is the opportunity we have

right now to reform our outmoded and complex Tax Code and also, most importantly, to provide tax relief for our Nation’s families, farmers, and small businesses.

Our Tax Code has not been updated since 1986. When you think about all that has changed over the last 30 years, you know that modern advances in technology have drastically revolutionized the way business is conducted. Today, the creation of the internet, substantially increased automation, and instant communications have created dramatic changes and in many ways have brought us closer in terms of communication and have interconnected our global economy in ways we never could have foreseen back in the 1980s, when we last reformed our Tax Code.

So it is past time—not time but past time—to modernize our outdated Tax Code to the 21st century. We must do so in order to ensure that American businesses can compete on the global stage, while providing tax relief to hard-working middle-class families who have been struggling to get and stay ahead over the last decade.

The recently released tax blueprint proposes sweeping tax reforms that will benefit working families and small businesses throughout the country while promoting job creation, economic growth, and global competitiveness. This country was built on hard work by individuals and families who strive each and every day to make ends meet to provide for their loved ones and to plan for retirement. The current Tax Code is complex and has many loopholes that do nothing to help our hard-working families keep more of their own hard-earned money. Our tax framework will help individuals and families in my home State and across this country to get ahead by generating new jobs through sustained economic growth while lowering the overall tax burden and putting more money back in the taxpayers’ pockets.

We do this in a number of ways: by doubling the standard deduction, by eliminating taxes on the first \$12,000 earned by an individual and \$24,000 earned by a married couple, effectively establishing a zero-percent tax rate as the bottom bracket—the bottom tax rate. That means that nearly 81 percent of North Dakotans who claim the standard deduction could see a significant increase in their take-home pay. That is true of other States across the country as well. Further, we are consolidating and lowering the tax rates across the board while simplifying the Tax Code to make it fairer for every-

body. At nearly 70,000 pages long, it is no wonder that Americans currently spend 6 billion hours a year complying with the Tax Code. In fact, 94 percent of taxpayers choose either to pay someone else or to use software to prepare their taxes because of the complexity of our Tax Code. Our goal for tax reform is to allow the vast majority of

Americans to file their tax returns on a single page—a simple calculation, something they can do themselves. We want to reduce the cost and stress that many Americans feel during tax season.

Further, our tax framework aims to create greater opportunities for small business owners, farmers, and others to help grow our economy and be more competitive than ever before. While we focus on a business friendly State in North Dakota—we have a very business friendly climate—the Federal tax continues to place an undue burden on the nearly 71,000 small businesses that operate in our State, which is more than 95 percent of all of the employers in the State. Again, this is something that applies across the Nation. The driver of our economy, the backbone of our economy is small business. They are the job generators. They are the job creators. We have to do more to help them do what they do, which is to create jobs and to grow our economy.

The same applies to our family farmers. My State alone has more than 30,000 family farms and ranches. Their marginal tax rate can reach as high as almost 45 percent, nearly twice the average rate of the rest of the industrialized world. That creates real challenges. This tax framework follows the example we have set in our State by restoring economic opportunity, by lowering the tax burden, and by enacting a pro-growth tax code.

Economists in general agree that high corporate taxes reduce wages to workers, raise costs to consumers, and reduce returns on retirement savings. That affects all of us. Maintaining high tax rates does nothing to improve the fairness of our system. It only punishes everyday citizens and reduces economic opportunities for all Americans.

For far too long, our Tax Code has incentivized American companies to send jobs and investment overseas, instead of keeping them here at home—keeping that investment, keeping those jobs here at home. Consequently, large multinational corporations now hold approximately \$2.6 trillion overseas. That is money that could be repatriated back to the United States for investment in American jobs here at home. Our framework would end the loopholes and the incentives that keep foreign profits offshore by moving to a territorial tax system and encouraging repatriation of these offshore funds, bringing that investment back to America. This is about getting the American economy going again and creating jobs and opportunity here at home rather than overseas.

It is vital that we advance a comprehensive tax reform that simplifies the IRS code and simplifies rates. Putting more money in the pockets of working individuals and families and empowering private investment will drive domestic job creation and increase wages through higher demand for labor and lower business costs. All the while we can ensure stable government revenues through a broader tax

base, a growing economy, and a more efficient tax system. That means that we will continue to be able to fund our priorities as we work to get our debt and deficit under control.

Ensuring U.S. competitiveness in the global marketplace and providing tax relief to middle-class families will benefit both current and future generations. I urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to work together to get tax reform done for the people of my State of North Dakota, for their respective States, and for Americans across this entire country.

With that, Madam President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

HEALTHCARE

Mr. PETERS. Madam President, in many ways, the Children's Health Insurance Program has been an outstanding example of what a bipartisan, democratic process can accomplish. Twenty years ago, President Bill Clinton worked with a Republican majority in both the Senate and the House of Representatives to successfully pass the Children's Health Insurance Program into law. That legislation passed with 85 votes in the Senate—an overwhelmingly bipartisan vote—to recognize the simple fact that all children born in this great country of ours should have healthcare coverage.

The Children's Health Insurance Program, along with our Nation's community health centers, has more often than not seen great bipartisan support. As Members of Congress, we have always come together and understood the importance of these programs, and we have done everything we can to ensure that quality, cost-effective care is available to millions of Americans. Unfortunately, as I stand here today, funding for both the Children's Health Insurance Program and community health centers has expired.

The Children's Health Insurance Program, or CHIP, provides healthcare coverage to over 100,000 children in my home State of Michigan and more than 9 million children nationally. In addition, community health centers serve as the primary medical home to over 600,000 Michiganders and more than 20 million individuals across our country. For people living in rural and underserved areas, their community health center is their doctor's office and often their only choice when it comes to care close to home.

We have already passed the deadline to extend the Children's Health Insurance Program and the Community Health Center Fund. We have passed the time to act. We should not wait any longer to provide certainty to the millions of children and their families who depend on CHIP and to the Americans who will lose access to care if their community health center is closed.

We are already seeing the impact of our inaction in the CHIP program. Several States have begun to warn that

they may be forced to end enrollment of new children, cut back services, or end their programs altogether if we do not act soon. Independent experts estimate that at least 10 States could completely run out of funding for their Children's Health Insurance Program before the end of the year, while funding for the remaining States' programs would not be very far behind.

This is not a responsible way to govern. I have heard from physicians in my State, especially in rural communities, who fear that this lack of action will mean great harm to the patients they serve. I have heard from pediatricians who know firsthand what the end of CHIP would mean for Michigan's children. As our country grapples with what we can do to expand mental health treatment and address the expanding opioid epidemic, letting these programs lapse would be a huge step in the wrong direction. This unnecessary uncertainty has already forced some community health centers to contemplate staff hiring freezes and layoffs. It is certainly harming their day-to-day operations. It has made it difficult for them to recruit new doctors, and it has made it harder for their offices to obtain loans to grow their practices and to serve more patients.

Luckily, this is a problem we know how to solve. I am proud to have cosponsored bipartisan legislation with Senators HATCH and WYDEN that would ensure funding for the Children's Health Insurance Program. I also support similarly bipartisan legislation by Senators BLUNT and STABENOW to extend funding for our Nation's community health centers.

I welcome the fact that the Senate Finance Committee held a markup yesterday and was able to advance the bipartisan bill to fund the Children's Health Insurance Program. Now the rest of us in Congress need to do our job. Let's bring both of these bills up for a vote because, quite frankly, we cannot afford to wait any longer. Our Nation's children and millions of Americans who use community health centers as their primary medical home cannot afford to wait any longer. Historically, these programs have not been controversial to reauthorize, and they should not be now.

I am urging my colleagues to prioritize the children of our rural and underserved communities who will be hurt if we do not act soon. Let's do what is right for our country's children and families and pass this vital legislation as soon as possible.

Madam President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Ms. HEITKAMP. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CASIDY). Without objection, it is so ordered.

(The remarks of Ms. HEITKAMP and Ms. MURKOWSKI pertaining to the introduction of S. 1942 are printed in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

TRIBUTE TO REVEREND DR. ALONZO B.

PATTERSON, JR., AND MRS. SHIRLEY PATTERSON

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I wish to recognize an extraordinary individual in my State, along with his wife. I would like to take a few minutes today to recognize Reverend Dr. Alonzo B. Patterson, Jr., and Mrs. Shirley Patterson.

During the first week of November, Anchorage is going to host 4 days of events to commemorate the service of two of our most beloved community leaders, the Reverend Dr. Alonzo B. Patterson and his wife, Shirley Patterson. Next month, Reverend Patterson leaves the pulpit of Shiloh Missionary Baptist Church. This is a pulpit he has held for some 47 years. Mrs. Patterson, his wife of six decades, is to be recognized for her service as well.

Anchorage is one of America's great communities, and it is not uncommon to celebrate the retirement of a figure of Patterson's stature, but 4 separate days of events—that is huge, and it is a testament to the respect our community has for the Patterson family.

Think about this: Alaska has been a State for just 58 years. Reverend Patterson has had his pulpit for 47 years. And Shiloh is not Reverend Patterson's first pulpit in Alaska; it is his second. He came to Anchorage after founding the Corinthian Baptist Church in Fairbanks. Reverend Patterson grew up with Alaska, and Alaska grew up with Reverend Patterson.

Corinthian and Shiloh could appropriately be characterized as African-American churches. But for the African-American community in Alaska, they are far more than churches; they are centers of Black history in Alaska.

Zakiya McCummings interviewed Reverend Patterson earlier this year for an article published in the Anchorage Press, and in that interview, Reverend Patterson explained:

The church was, and always has been, the sanctuary in the Black community. It is the meeting place, the community center, the focus for support and help, the place you come to be important, the psychologist for your particular problem, the time to shout out your frustrations and the only place to be significant. You could be a Deacon or something in the church where in the rest of the community, you were just another Black person. The church was for us a panacea for many of the social ills that existed then and still have relevance.

Given the central role Reverend Patterson has played in Alaska's African-American community for most of our State's existence, it is no surprise that he is regarded as a historian of Black culture in Alaska. Ms. McCummings observed that it is a responsibility that he doesn't take lightly. Reverend Patterson told her:

I feel like I have to be the keeper of our historical plight and to speak to each generation in my time. It is a powerful responsibility because if I go to sleep on my watch,

then the next watch will have nothing to build on. . . . We're responsible that the gate remains open for the next generation.

Under Reverend Patterson's watch, there was much progress. In the 1960s and 1970s, Reverend Patterson recalled, "much of Alaska was small family businesses, including the banks. If you were not part of that family or their friends, you had a hard time getting a job.

Many of the jobs for African Americans were either construction or government jobs."

Reverend Patterson proudly recalls the first Black principal of a State elementary school, an African-American banker who was elected to the school board and subsequently to the Alaska Legislature, an African-American activist in the Fairview section of Anchorage who is regarded as the grandfather of the city's public transportation system. Today's African-American community is built on the foundation of these pioneers who endured.

Make no mistake about this, Alonzo Patterson was no mere spectator to all of this progress. He was an agent of change, rooted in his observation, and he stated: "In ministry there are no limits except the ones we set for ourselves." Under his leadership, Shiloh grew spiritually, physically, and fiscally, and would include a church school, a television ministry, and a jail outreach ministry.

On Shiloh's 29th anniversary, the mortgage note for the original structure was burned under the theme, "Burning to Build," and groundbreaking for a new educational wing commenced. There was more building to come. The Martin Luther King Jr. Family Life Center was dedicated on May 23, 1993. In 2001, Reverend Patterson spun off a new nonprofit organization, Shiloh Community Development, Inc., to serve youth, minorities, and the disadvantaged. Today Shiloh Community Development is well known for its youth mentoring program called Young Lions of Alaska.

He is a founder of Bridge Builders of Alaska, which celebrates the diversity of our communities and a powerful voice in Alaska's annual celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King Day. In 2015, Reverend Patterson was the keynote speaker at the King Day ceremonies on JBER. At that ceremony, he warned his audience that Dr. King's dream is at risk of dying. He said:

This dream is at risk if nothing is done, and nothing is holding us back but ourselves. Stop waiting for miracles; believe in yourself to make society better. Each of us can do our part, by loving and respecting others.

This is just one example of his powerful voice. Reverend Patterson's sermons were always inspiring, many legendary, and it explains why he is regarded as a pastor's pastor, growing not only his congregants but the generations of ministers who will follow in his footsteps. As one who has joined in the congregation there at Shiloh on numerous occasions, I can attest that

there was never a Sunday that I did not leave feeling inspired by the words of Dr. Patterson.

They aren't calling the appreciation festivities for Reverend Patterson a retirement ceremony. They are calling it a transition, probably because nobody believes Rev. Alonzo Patterson has any intentions of pursuing a future of leisure. Leadership and inspiration runs in Alonzo Patterson's DNA.

We wish him and Shirley well in their next calling, and we take comfort in the fact that their contributions to our community are far from over. November marks a transition, not a retirement—and certainly not a eulogy—for this extraordinary Alaska family.

On behalf of my Senate colleagues, I thank Dr. Patterson and his lovely wife Shirley for their good works, and thank them in advance for their continued leadership.

ALASKA AIRLINES "COMBI" PLANES

Mr. President, I know I have occupied a little bit of time on the floor this afternoon with a wide range of topics—from the tragedies that face many of our indigenous women to recognizing a prominent leader of the Alaska community. Now I wish to share a little bit of Alaska's history as we see a transition in aviation and transportation.

It is really the end of an era in my home State. On October 18, just a few days from now, Alaska Airlines will fly the final run of the uniquely Alaskan combi plane before retiring them and updating the fleet.

OK. She is going to make a floor speech about an airplane. Yes, I am going to make a floor speech about an airplane because this combi plane is a special Boeing 737-400, designed to carry up to 14,000 pounds of cargo and 72 passengers. It is called a combi because it is a dual-use plane, a combination of passengers and cargo. Alaska Airlines is the only major airline in the country to have these combi planes, and they were specifically designed for the special challenges of a very large State. Over their lifespan, they have delivered every imaginable thing via airplane in Alaska.

You have all heard me talk about the size of our State. The sheer size of this State presents logistical hurdles unlike anyplace else. I keep saying we are one-fifth the size of the country, and 80 percent of our communities are not connected by road. When we think about how we move around in our State, a postage stamp placed in the middle of an average sheet of paper represents the area a person can reach in Alaska by coastline, river, road, or railroad. The rest is only reachable by plane. You just have to fly everywhere. This being the case, it only makes sense to try to efficiently deliver people and goods to hub communities in Alaska. Alaska Airlines is looking to serve. This is not a promotion for them; it is a recognition that they needed to figure out how to move people and freight, and they reconfigured the aircraft to do this.

What makes these planes so special is, they can carry up to four large cargo containers. We call them igloos. These igloos load into the front portion of the aircraft, right behind the pilots. There is a simple divider between the cargo and the passengers. So they load the cargo up front, and the passengers come up the back on a set of steps, just like we used to do in the prejetway times. You load from the back, but your first 17 rows of a traditional aircraft would be occupied by cargo. If you have more cargo—if you are flying fish out from Cordova south or if you are flying your Iditarod dogs that have been dropped in Nome and need to get back to Anchorage and you need a lot of space for the animals, you have flexibility to move back and forth.

These have flown all over the State, up to Nome, on the Bering Sea coast, along the Arctic Ocean, to the oilfields in Prudhoe, and, most famously, in the "milk run" area. The milk run got its name because Alaska Airlines literally delivered the milk to the communities along the way, as well as other food stuff—all manner of goods and passenger. It is something that if you are from the southeast, we all know about the milk run. We all complain about the fact that it takes about 5 hours to get from Anchorage down to Juneau, if you have to go through Yakutat and Cordova and stop at each one. That is just the way it is. You bounce down from Cordova, Yakutat, Juneau, Ketchikan. Finally, you hit Seattle. You run into your sports teams, families are coming and going. These are the workhorses that are not only moving the passengers, they are moving the groceries, they are moving the mail, they are moving the medicine. They are moving it all.

When I say it moves everything, we have built up a little bit of history about how things move around. We have moved cows. We have moved cars. The picture I like best is moving the herd of Santa's reindeer. I think Santa was actually posed in this, but the reindeer were not. They needed to be able to move the reindeer so they hauled them in the front, situated them, and closed it off, and you have the passengers in the back. Whether you are moving reindeer, whether you are transporting an injured eagle to the Raptor Center in Sitka or letting the sled dogs hitch a ride back to Anchorage after they have made the thousand-mile trip to Nome, this is what we do.

The invention of the combi plane really highlights the unique needs and the parameters of daily life in the State. We are a long way from the lower 48. You can barely drive to any of the communities. If you are going to move goods, if you are going to move passengers, you are on an airplane. Whether it is Essential Air Services, bypass mail, air freight, these are the backbones of commerce in Alaska. This is our interstate. It is the interstate in the air.

Whether we are shipping our wild caught, sustainably managed salmon that people around the world love to eat, we ship that out. We ship in the toothpaste, the loaves of bread, and the basics that we need. Thanks to the combi, we have been able to do this with regular, reliable scheduled service in areas where the weather would usually chase off more. These are smaller aircraft. They can handle it all. The size of the combi allows them to land and take off in much more turbulent conditions than smaller propeller planes.

So it is a kind of bittersweet time for some of us who have grown up around these aircraft. As we think about the “only in Alaska” type of things, it is encouraging to know that this development of retiring the combi planes—the proposal is to replace them with separate, full-sized passenger and cargo planes. As a result of the increased demand for goods and passengers, we need more space on planes to deliver both. If updating the fleet means that we need and get more business in Alaska, I suppose that is a good thing for all.

There are many of us who are going to be bidding a fond farewell come October 18, which is the last scheduled flight for the combi. It is also Alaska Day in our State. I thank Alaska Airlines and those who fly these great planes and do so safely. They provide a level of service and have for so long. I thank them for what they have done over the course of so many years.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SCHATZ. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

TAX REFORM

Mr. SCHATZ. Mr. President, here is what is happening with so-called “tax reform.” Tonight, the Budget Committee is voting on a budget resolution that does two things.

First, it sets the spending limits for everything in the government—environment, energy, defense, healthcare, education, transportation, and so on.

Second, it includes something called reconciliation instructions that basically direct all of the committees to report back with legislation that either increases or decreases the Federal deficit by a certain amount. This time around, here is what they are doing—asking the Senate Finance Committee to draft legislation to increase the deficit by \$1.5 trillion. Again, this is going to pass on a party-line vote, with Republicans prevailing, to increase the deficit by \$1.5 trillion. This is what will start the tax reform process.

That is not all. Republicans still haven’t given up on decimating our healthcare system. They are still trying to cut Medicaid and, this time,

Medicare, and they are going to use this tax bill. They are going to cut \$473 billion from Medicare at a time when our population is getting older and many seniors are already struggling. They are also going to cut \$1 trillion from Medicaid. This is the program that pays for one out of every two births in this country. It helps millions of families who have loved ones in nursing home care.

Last week, they tried to pass a healthcare bill that cut taxes. Now they are trying to pass a tax bill that will cut healthcare. Their proposal will, actually, increase the deficit by \$4 trillion. That is 12 zeros.

Here is what we could do with \$4 trillion. We could completely rebuild half of the airports in the United States. We could put 20 million people through 4 years of college. We could pay off the debt for every student loan.

Instead, the United States is going to be in the red by \$4 trillion, but after they cut \$1 trillion from Medicaid and one-half trillion dollars from Medicare, the party that has railed against the Federal debt and deficit will still add \$2.5 trillion to the deficit.

This is all so that they can give tax cuts to the richest people in the United States. I promise you, I understand that both parties are sometimes guilty of exaggerating and that sometimes both parties are guilty of relying on talking points and relying on caricatures of the other side, but you couldn’t caricature this bill if you tried. This bill is already a caricature of what people say Republicans are all about, which is to shred the social safety net and provide tax cuts to the wealthiest Americans.

They are going to cut the corporate tax rate from 35 to 20 percent, and they are going to cut tax rates across the board, but the people who will actually benefit will be the people at the top. The Tax Policy Center, which is a non-partisan, highly respected group, has crunched the numbers, and they found that within 10 years, 80 percent of the benefits of this \$4 trillion tax bill will go to 1 percent of Americans.

Remember what is happening. We are borrowing a huge chunk of this, and whatever is not borrowed comes out of Medicare and Medicaid. So the programs that pay for women to give birth in a hospital or for elderly people to get healthcare will be decimated, and the wealthiest Americans will pay less in taxes. This is bad policy, not just for the people who work hard but for the whole economy.

I want to give you a specific example. Again, both parties rely on talking points, and both parties accuse each other of having the wrong set of ideas, but we have an example of what happens when you do this. This bill is actually modeled after what they did in the State of Kansas. The State government eliminated one of its business taxes, telling people that it would help the State’s economy. Instead, the economy slowed down, which left them with

even lower tax revenues. They had to cut government programs, like education, and now people do not want to send their kids to Kansas public schools anymore because they do not have the resources to educate their children.

This is not a path that America should follow. Everyone needs to pay their fair share, and that includes big corporations and the people who are benefiting from the system and making millions of dollars every year, but in this proposal, they are the ones getting all of the tax breaks.

Companies already have huge tax breaks. Some corporations end up paying zero in Federal income tax every April 15 even though they are making healthy profits. They have teams of lawyers and accountants who help them dodge paying even a penny to the Federal Government. That is why corporate income taxes make up less than 10 percent of all of the revenue to the Federal Treasury. Meanwhile, at least 30 percent of the middle class will actually pay more if the Republicans succeed with their tax reform package.

Think about this.

Thirty percent of the middle class is going to see tax increases in their tax bills. Why? It is because they have to find some money to subsidize the tax cuts for the richest people. Some of the money will be found by borrowing; some of the money will be found by making cuts to Medicare and Medicaid; and some of the money will be found by increasing taxes on the middle class. One out of every two households with children will see its taxes go up under this plan. Increasing taxes for these people while decreasing them for big corporations is not a plan for economic growth. We have heard over and over that Republicans do not want to add to the deficit—I don’t either—but this is, literally, what they are voting to do tonight.

Again, this is not a talking point. This is not a sort of rhetorical flourish. The bill, itself, provides for \$1.5 trillion worth of deficit spending. Yet it is not deficit spending on the military; it is not deficit spending on disaster response; and it is not deficit spending on Medicare or Medicaid or Social Security or any of the social safety net programs that they claim is the problem with the Federal budget. It is deficit spending for the purpose of a tax cut, 80 percent of which is going to 1 percent of the country. This is not conservative—certainly not fiscally conservative—and it will not help us to grow the economy.

It is no surprise that this policy is bad, because, again, the process has been so bad. With healthcare, they ignored regular order. They obliterated the committee process. They ignored Democrats. They ignored the way the U.S. Senate is supposed to work, and they failed. One Republican Senator says that he will not vote for anything that adds one penny to the deficit. Another Republican Senator said that he

will not do anything that does not cut taxes for everybody. It already does not meet that test. Members of Congress on both sides of the aisle—Republicans too—have promised not to cut Medicaid or Medicare. It violates all of those promises.

If you did not like the ACA repeal because it cut Medicaid, guess what. This cuts Medicaid more. If you made a promise to your voters not to cut Medicare, you should be aware that this bill provides for one-half trillion dollars in cuts to Medicare. If you are railing against debt and deficits, this is the biggest budget buster that I have ever seen in my short, 5-year career in the U.S. Senate.

During the campaign, the President of the United States promised not to cut Medicare, and the senior Senator from Arizona has called for regular order. This violates every procedural and policy principle that has been articulated on this Senate floor since I have been here. I do not see a way forward on this legislation when it has been conceived in a purely partisan way. It will only take us deeper into dysfunction. For the sake of the Senate, let's stop going down this path. Let's restore regular order and work together on a bipartisan tax reform process.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

TRIBUTE TO PASTOR ALONZO PATTERSON

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, nearly every week I have been coming down to the Senate floor to recognize someone in my State who has made a difference for Alaska and really has made a difference for all Americans. It is my favorite part of the week to actually come down and talk about Alaska to my colleagues in the Senate, to the folks in the Gallery, to the press, and to the American people watching. It is what I refer to as our time to talk about the Alaskan of the Week.

Many watching and on the floor and those who have visited our great State know that Alaskans think it is the most beautiful place in the world. There are natural wonders everywhere. We had a beautiful summer. We have resilient, warm-hearted, fiercely independent but accepting people. We have challenges in Alaska just like the rest of the country, but at the heart of our State are kind, generous people full of different cultures and backgrounds that we celebrate.

Most people don't know this about Anchorage, AK: My hometown is probably the most culturally and ethnically diverse city in the country. We have places of worship all over the city and the State that reflect that great diversity of Alaska and America.

One of the stalwarts of our faith community for the past 47 years has been Pastor Alonzo Patterson of the Shiloh Missionary Baptist Church, and he is our Alaskan of the week. Every Sunday he fills his church with spirit, joy, and gospel music punctuated by "amens" that float through the church, down the street, and work their way into our community and into our hearts. That is what he has been doing for 47 years. For decades, those sermons have inspired countless Alaskans to help feed the hungry, provide homes for those without, and strive to create a more just country, State, and society, and a more just community.

Let me tell you a little bit about Pastor Patterson. He was born in Wilson, LA, and raised in New Orleans. Like a lot of Alaskans, thousands of Alaskans, he joined the military and made his way up to Fairbanks, AK, in the 1960s, where he founded the Corinthian Baptist Church, and he ministered to the congregation there. Then, in 1970, he was called to Shiloh, one of the few African-American churches in Anchorage. He designed and rebuilt Shiloh at its current location, and under his leadership, Shiloh's membership, its facilities, and its energy took off.

He has conducted thousands of marriages and baptisms. He has given thousands of eulogies, celebrated graduations and anniversaries, counseled countless couples, people who are grieving, people who are rejoicing, people who are suffering, and he has helped turn that into action—not just for the African-American community but for all people and all races in our community and in our State.

Pastor Patterson told a reporter:

The church was and always has been a sanctuary in the Black community. It is the meeting place, the community center, the focus for support and help, the place you come to be important, the psychologist for your particular problem, the time to shout out your frustrations and the only place to be significant.

He continued:

You could be a Deacon or something in the church where in the rest of the community you were just another Black person. The church was for us a panacea for many of the social ills that existed then and still have relevance.

That is what he talked about. That is his heart and soul, how he saw his church and congregation. Thanks to Pastor Patterson and Shiloh, the city is a more inclusive place for all. He has helped heal those social ills for thousands of our fellow Alaskans.

One of his friends, Celeste Hodge Growden, a member of the church, said:

He and the church have led the way for a lot of things that have been accomplished here [in Anchorage]. Pastor Patterson always says, "leaders lead." That is the way he has lived his life. He is not in the back-ground.

During election time, Pastor Patterson organizes a huge "get out the vote" campaign. He was instrumental in getting a Martin Luther King memorial in Anchorage—a 10-year-long endeavor.

She also talked about the groups he chaired, founded, and led beyond his congregation, including Bridge Builders of Anchorage, the March of Dimes Foundation, the Martin Luther King Jr. Foundation of Alaska, and the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance of Anchorage.

You know, with leaders like this, the list goes on and on. In addition to Corinthian Baptist Church in Fairbanks and Shiloh in Anchorage, Pastor Patterson also planted Eagle River Missionary Baptist Church and Shiloh Missionary Baptist Church of Palmer.

I have been uplifted to the core when my wife Julie and I have gone to Shiloh and listened to Pastor Patterson preach and listened to the beautiful—and I mean beautiful—Shiloh choir sing. It is a spiritual and energizing experience like no other. I love attending services at Shiloh.

On November 5, 2017, Pastor Patterson's 80th birthday, he will be giving his last sermon as pastor of Shiloh, and I certainly plan on being there. He is stepping down for Pastor Undra Parker, who will be the new and dynamic leader of Shiloh—another great Alaskan, another veteran—and I know he is going to do a great job. But of course it is a bittersweet time for Shiloh's parishioners because of the foundation Pastor Patterson built.

The church, the singing, and the amens will continue on Earth and the church in Anchorage, AK, as it is in Heaven. God bless Pastor Patterson, his wife of 61 years, First Lady Shirley Patterson, and the congregation of Shiloh Missionary Baptist Church for all they have done and continue to do for our community.

Congratulations to Pastor Patterson for being our Alaskan of the Week.

Mr. President, I would like to say a few words about my Members on the other side of the aisle who are doing something that is just not helping the United States of America right now; that is, obstructing progress with regard to the new administration.

I understand that right now my party is in the majority, and to be honest, I have been someone who thinks we should spend a lot more time here in the Senate, working in the Senate and getting things done. We have a lot of work to do. But I see that people back home can get frustrated with some of the lack of progress, and some of that we can address by spending more time in this body.

Some of the questions that are coming out are about why things aren't getting done. It is a good question. Answers can be complicated, but what it mostly boils down to is that a lot of issues in this body—a lot—rely on consensus. The rules were carefully constructed so that the minority has a say in the legislative process. For the most part, I believe that is a good thing. As a former President once pointed out, we are not a red or blue America; we are the United States of America.

With that said, the people did elect us to come here and start getting

things done. Implicit in their votes for a new President and a new administration was to be able to put people in the Federal Government to work, to focus on growing the economy, and to focus on rebuilding the military after a 25-percent cut over the last 8 years, to focus on better jobs and higher wages.

Throughout history, whether it has been Republicans or Democrats, the minority party has understood this. When a new administration gets elected, they start to put nominees in place, and the Senate takes action. We hold hearings and we have votes to put Senate-confirmed officials in the Federal Government to work. If you don't like the person, you can ask them tough questions in hearings and you can vote against them on the floor of the Senate or in committees. But what we are seeing right now is pure obstruction. On every single nominee, the maximum amount of time is required before there is even a vote. This is something new. This is something different. In fact, the current minority leader said the following words in 2013:

Who in America doesn't think a President, Democrat or Republican, deserves his or her picks for who should run the Federal Government agencies? Nobody.

That was the minority leader in 2013. They were wise words then, but apparently he and his Members have forgotten those words.

I have some facts here on the board. At this point in time, 10 months into President Obama's Presidency in 2009, the Senate had allowed more than 318 nominees to be cast by a simple vote. The Senate only asked for a procedure known as cloture five times. Essentially, President Obama got elected, and the Senate Democrats and Republicans worked to get his team put in place. Yes, the Republicans did that. Certainly, I wasn't here then. They voted against some of these nominees, and that is fine. But what they did was they let them come to the floor for a vote.

In contrast to what I mentioned about President Obama's first year in office, only 100 of President Trump's nominees have been confirmed through voice vote. That is less than one-third of the courtesy given to President Obama 8 years ago. Cloture votes for Trump's nominees have been required for 100 nominees. Remember, I just said there were five for Obama's nominees 8 years ago. There have been 100 for Trump's nominees, and only 63 have been allowed by simple voice vote. What does that mean? It means that each vote requires a 2-day waiting period and then another 30 hours of debate. That is what it means.

The press won't write about it. My friends in the press sitting up here in the Gallery won't write about this. The contrast between the Trump treatment by the Senate and the Obama treatment by the Senate is incredible, and we don't hear a word out of the press on this. And this isn't partisan; this is just hurting the American people.

There was an election, and now we need to fill the government with people who can run agencies. With all due respect to my friends on the other side of the aisle, they are not doing it. They are not allowing it.

We had a vote on an Eighth Circuit judge last week. It had to go through cloture. We essentially spent the whole week on this—2 days and 30 hours. The judge passed the Senate by a 95-to-1 vote. It was a 95-to-1 vote. He wasn't controversial at all so what was the point? The point was simply to delay.

Again, here is the difference. Nominations sent to the Senate are about the same. President Obama had more 8 years ago but not too many more. There were 520 versus 443 for President Trump confirmed. At this time during the Obama administration, there were 342. Trump has 163. So that is 66 percent for the Obama nominees 8 years ago and 37 percent for the Trump nominees.

The press will not write about it, but this is a disservice to Americans, whether you are a Democrat or Republican. I will just mention a few. We have had nominees, such as the Assistant Secretary for Health in Health and Human Services. It came out of committee several weeks ago. It is sitting on the floor. The Assistant Secretary of Health, it is not a controversial position for the company, but it is an important position. I bet that person is going to finally get passage from the Senate at some point by a big supermajority, but we are delaying it. We are delaying it.

I really would love it if the minority leader would come down, look at the American people, and just say: Here is why we are delaying. Here is why we are delaying. Explain it. They love to do this kind of stuff, procedural "dark arts," thinking people aren't watching. People understand this.

The head of a leading Democratic think tank told the press they intend to hold up and tie up floor time on every single Trump administration nominee. Now, if that happens, if they take the time for every nominee—there are over 1,000 who need Senate confirmation—and they take the entire amount of time they are allowed with cloture and other votes, if they don't extend the courtesy that was extended to President Obama when he was trying to put his team in place, the Trump administration will never have a team in place. It will literally be 4 years.

I hope today the press starts writing about this because the difference here in 8 years is quite remarkable and yet nobody is talking about it; that being that the minority leader and my colleagues on the other side of the aisle stop obstructing what every other administration has had in terms of a courtesy, which is, if you win the election, whether you liked it or not, you work with the other side in the U.S. Senate to get your people in place—Department of Defense officials, Department of Transportation officials, De-

partment of Health officials, Environmental Protection Agency officials. We have to get the country moving again, and the obstruction, which is unprecedented, by the minority leader and unfortunately many of my colleagues on the other side is only harming the American people. It is only harming the progress that the vast majority of Americans want, whether you are a Democrat or a Republican. I am hopeful they are finally going to change and start moving forward nominations and letting us vote on them so we have an opportunity to actually get this country moving again.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

LAS VEGAS MASS SHOOTING

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, I would like to begin by talking about the recent tragedy in Las Vegas, the largest mass shooting in U.S. history, with at least 59 dead and more than 500 injured, including one Minnesotan who was injured and another who lost his life. So I join my colleagues in mourning for the victims and their families. They are and should be our focus at this time, as well as making sure those who were hurt get the best medical care this country can give.

As we look ahead, these events underscore the urgency to continue fighting for funding to better treat mental illness but also for sensible gun safety legislation, and I joined with some of my colleagues the day after the tragedy in Las Vegas to call for those changes. No one policy will prevent every tragedy, but we need to come together on commonsense legislation to save lives.

One place we discussed this week where we could come together—because we have in the past—is on background checks. My colleagues Senator MANCHIN and Senator TOOMEY, who are two A-rated NRA Senators, have already demonstrated that we can find bipartisan agreement on something as straightforward as background checks. I was very pleased they came together on this legislation, but the fact remains, the Senate's failure to pass that bipartisan compromise was disheartening—one of my more disheartening days in the Senate because I began my day that day with the families of the Sandy Hook tragedy, with the parents who had lost their little kids, with the parents who had come to this building to advocate for a bill, the background check bill, that they knew wouldn't have saved their child's life, but they knew it would have saved others. What we have seen with expanded background checks is they reduce suicides and they reduce domestic homicides by a fairly large number.

Our constituents agree that we should be able to find some agreement here, as the numbers have consistently shown that Americans across the political spectrum, including gun owners, support proposals to require background checks by wide margins. I have

a State, like the Presiding Officer's, where there are a lot of hunters. It is a proud tradition in Minnesota so I look at all these proposals and I say to myself: Does this hurt my Uncle Dick and his deer stand? For many of the ones I have looked at, the answer is clearly no, including the background check bill.

When I talk to law enforcement in my State, they stress the need to have effective background checks to stop felons, people with severe mental illnesses, and others prohibited under current law from accessing guns. These efforts do not have to infringe in any way on Americans' lawful right to own guns.

Another sensible measure is Senator FEINSTEIN's legislation to close a loophole that allows bump stop devices to convert semiautomatic firearms into weapons that work like fully automatic guns. Law enforcement officers have now recovered 12 of these devices from the Las Vegas shooter's room. I am a cosponsor of that bill, and I am encouraged that some of my Republican colleagues have agreed to look at this.

I hope we can find a path forward in the weeks ahead, not only with regard to this particular focus, the bump stock device legislation, but also on some of the other bills like the background check bill.

HEALTHCARE

Mr. President, I am here for another purpose today; that is, that we must get to work on other important business in the Senate. We need to reauthorize the Children's Health Insurance Program and come together on bipartisan fixes to the Affordable Care Act. No parent should ever have to worry whether their child will have healthcare, but funding for the Children's Health Insurance Program, or CHIP, expired over this weekend. CHIP is one of the great bipartisan success stories. Both parties have come together to support a program that provides healthcare to millions of children.

In Minnesota, these funds support coverage for 125,000 children. I heard from the children's hospitals and clinics of Minnesota just last week about many of the families who count on this program. While States like mine are finding ways to make Federal funding last a bit longer, since ours has already expired, every single day Congress doesn't act puts coverage of millions of children at risk.

There is already bipartisan work underway to keep this program going. Senator HATCH and Senator WYDEN have introduced a bipartisan bill to extend CHIP for 5 years. In 2015, the last time we renewed this program, it passed the Senate with 92 votes—92 out of 100 votes. We should demonstrate that same bipartisan spirit again. The children in America are counting on us. We must act before it is too late or States like mine may be forced to make difficult choices about insurance

coverage for some of our more vulnerable constituents.

CHIP is one part of our healthcare system that is working. We should be doing everything in our power to protect it. So let's come together and pass this long-term reauthorization of CHIP.

Mr. President, CHIP is not the only area where we should be able to come together on healthcare. The American people want us to work together on bipartisan fixes to the Affordable Care Act. As I said the day it passed, it was a beginning and not an end. Any major piece of legislation like that needs improvements and changes. Let's work together on the bipartisan bills and ideas that have been put forward. Just like my friend Senator MCCAIN said, we could do better working together—Republicans and Democrats.

Senator ALEXANDER and Senator MURRAY have been holding hearings and discussions on commonsense solutions to bring down insurance costs over the past month. We had Governors here, and there were actually more Republican Governors in the room than Democratic Governors, as they embraced these suggested changes which include reinsurance. I note Senator COLLINS and Senator NELSON, a Republican and a Democrat, have a bill together that would do something on that front.

I look at what has been done in Alaska—I see my colleague, Senator MURKOWSKI here—and what has been done in Minnesota when it comes to reinsurance, and we have seen some of the rates go down, not to where we need them to go, but there has been a decrease in the amount of rates. We would like to see that on a national basis, and that is why I am such a strong supporter of Senator ALEXANDER and Senator MURRAY's work.

Mr. President, finally, we need to be doing something on the skyrocketing cost of prescription drugs. People such as Kim from Plymouth, MN, is struggling to afford her insulin because it has gone up three times. She keeps the injector with a few drops of insulin from day-to-day so she can get by. That is why I think we should have Medicare Part D negotiations. I have a bill that now has 33 cosponsors that lifts the ban that makes it illegal for 41 million seniors to negotiate the prices of drugs. Seniors can be a pretty stubborn and very vocal group. Why don't we let them unleash their power and allow Medicaid to negotiate prices?

Senator GRASSLEY and I have a bill to stop pay for delay, where major pharmaceutical companies are paying off generics to keep their products off the market. I have a bill with Senator GRASSLEY, Senator LEAHY, and Senator LEE—the four of us lead the bill—the CREATES Act, which makes it easier to get more generic competition in the market. We also—MCCAIN and I, and Senator LEE and I—have bills that allow for safe drugs to come in from other countries to again create more

competition to bring the price down. When the prices of four of the top best selling drugs in America have gone up over 100 percent, I don't think we can just sit here and do nothing anymore.

I bring up these efforts because, for the most part, they are bipartisan—the work of Senator ALEXANDER and Senator MURRAY, the bills that have been introduced to do something on prescription drugs. Let's get moving on that and let's reauthorize CHIP. The last time it passed the Senate with 92 votes.

Thank you.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the en bloc consideration of the following nominations: Executive Calendar Nos. 323, 324, 325; that the Senate vote on the nominations en bloc, with no intervening action or debate; that if confirmed, the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table en bloc; that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action; that no further motions be in order; and that any statements relating to the nominations be printed in the RECORD.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. INHOFE. I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, it is my hope that we will be able to come to agreement with regard to the nominees whom I have just asked for consideration. These are individuals who have been moved out of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee to be named to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission. This is a Commission that has been without a functioning quorum for months on end. They have just recently been able to achieve that quorum, but they are not yet to a full complement.

We worked hard to reach an agreement with colleagues so these names could advance so the FERC could get to work in an expeditious manner. There is much to be considered. The work that has piled up, that has cost our economy, that has cost our country over these many months, as we have seen these delays when you don't have a functioning FERC, has been considerable. We want to try to reach agreement, but I am disappointed that we are not going to be able to advance them this afternoon.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

WILDFIRE FUNDING

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, 4 weeks ago, I stood here on the floor of the Senate and called for increased funding to fight the wildfires. This is just one of the dramatic pictures of Oregon ablaze. It is thousands and thousands of acres.

I had the experience of driving roughly 350 miles in my State and never escaping the smoke from the fires that were in every single corner and in every quadrant of the State of Oregon. We have seen the challenge of Mother Nature at work this year with Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria hitting in Texas, Florida, and Puerto Rico. But let's not forget the incredible damage being done in Montana, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington by these extraordinary fires.

Over the last decade, we have seen an average of 50,000 fires in America each year. They destroy and burn up more than 5 million acres, but this year the count is well over 8 million acres and counting. In Oregon, we normally have fires that burn, on average, about 500,000 acres, but this year we are well over 600,000 acres and counting.

As a result of these raging fires, we have many communities that have been so powerfully impacted and so many forests destructively impacted. We should stop and ask: What can we do better in terms of our forests and our communities? That is why I am taking to the floor right now.

The first thing we need to do is to end fire borrowing. This is where the U.S. Forest Service, in order to pay for fighting these fires, proceeds to borrow from every other account. This has become all too common. What are those other accounts? They are the hazardous fuels funds, forest management funds, forest restoration funds, forest conservation funds, road maintenance funds, and funds that are designed to prepare for future timber sales.

All of that does a lot of damage to the preparation. So the fires are more resilient and aren't susceptible to this type of firefighting. We have seen, on average in the last decade, a cost of fighting fires across the country of about \$1.6 billion. But this year, we are over \$3 billion—almost double. So even though the Appropriations Committee had wisely put in a buffer of several hundred million dollars to prevent fire borrowing, those funds were long ago wiped out.

So there we were 4 weeks ago. I was working to say that now that we are over the allotted funds for the year, let's immediately get more funds that can be used to backfill this shortage in September. I thank all of my colleagues for the fact that those funds were included in the continuing resolution. We successfully provided a bridge so that firefighting could continue and so that the fire borrowing was quickly repaid.

But that is not a permanent solution—to try to legislate or to backfill on a rapid basis. Indeed, when we have these kinds of fire seasons, it is like other natural disasters. It is like tornadoes and hurricanes and floods. So we need to have a FEMA-style backup for those worst ever fire seasons. That is what my colleagues Senator WYDEN and Senator CRAPO—bipartisan teamwork—have been putting forth. It is

called the Wildfire Disaster Funding Act of 2017. It says that when we reach a certain level of funding for fighting fires, the balance will go to a FEMA-style fund. That is exactly the way it should be done.

It has been estimated in the past that if just the top 1 percent or 2 percent of the worst fires were funded in FEMA-style fund, we would never have had fire borrowing in the past. But the most relevant kind of crisp and clean way to do that would be to adopt this bill Senator WYDEN and Senator CRAPO have put so much work into and which I am certainly pleased to cosponsor. That would be very useful, and we should do that now.

We should respond while the memory is fresh and, actually, while fires are still burning in State after State—certainly burning in my home State of Oregon. Then we should recognize, too, that this terrible fire year has done so much damage to so many communities. We have communities where the roads have been cut off. We have communities where the tourists disappeared because of the smoke, or other economic enterprises had to shut down for an extended period.

So as we assist those communities hit by Harvey and hit by Irma and hit by Maria, let's also help those communities that were hit by this year's extraordinary fires. That would mean strengthening the Small Business Disaster Loan Program. That would mean taking the additional funding for the USDA Emergency Community Water Assistance Program, and, certainly, it would mean making additional community development block grants available to the communities impacted by these fires. Let's not forget those communities as we provide assistance in funding to the communities affected by the hurricanes.

Then we also need to address the fact that many assets in our forests were scorched by these fires. There are trails that have to be repaired, roads that have to be repaired, watershed repairs to avoid landslides, facilities that were scorched and burned, and wildlife and fish management restoration, including critical sage grouse areas.

I was up visiting the incredible waterfall, the Multnomah Falls. They were explaining that several of the trails have bridges—there are so many bridges on the trails in Oregon—and that the fire had burned some of the understructure. So from above it looked like the bridges were safe, but they weren't safe. They can't reopen those trails until they get support to do all these repairs. The Forest Service has estimated that it will take \$150 million to restore the damage done to the Forest Service's infrastructure.

So we should make that happen as part of this bill. Then, we should turn to forest fire resilience. We have 2 million acres in need of fire prevention efforts in Oregon. Actually, we have far more of that in need of fire prevention, but we have nearly 2 million that have

already passed through environmental approval for work to reduce the hazardous fuels that are on the floor of the forest, and we need to thin these forests.

You can imagine that when you have clearcuts and those clearcuts are replanted, the trees grow back very close together. In a short amount of time, those forests are very good for fires and very good for disease, but they are neither good for ecosystems nor for timber stands. So they have to be thinned, and that thinning can be done, in Oregon alone, on nearly 2 million acres already approved through the environmental process. The challenge is to get more funds into that effort.

That, too, should be part of this because, whether you talk to an environmentalist or talk to somebody who wants sawlogs for the mills, they both know that if you thin these forests, you make them more resistant to fire. With better timber stands, you have better ecosystems, and you supply a steady supply of sawlogs to the mill.

Let's not reopen the timber wars of the past. Let's work together with a win-win.

I want to show this chart because it indicates the dramatic change of what has happened to the Forest Service budget. We can go back to 1995 and compare it to the year 2015. I want to focus particularly on the orange. The orange is the amount of money that was spent fighting forest fires, and 20 years ago, it was 16 percent of the Forest Service budget. But in 2015—2 years ago—it broke 50 percent. It was 52 percent of their budget. This year, it has certainly gone up much higher than that. So as the amount of funds spent on fighting fires has increased, it has dramatically reduced the amount of funds that support our maintenance and improvement of the forest. That is what is getting squeezed out.

Let me put it differently. The more you spend fighting fires out of a single pot of money, the less money you have to prevent the fires. Everywhere I go they say: Can't we do more on the front end so these forests are more resilient? If you think about how fire works, it really gets going if the trees are close together because one tree lights the next tree on fire. If you thin them, you slow that down. The fire goes from the ground, where there is brush, to the canopy, where there are branches, very easily if the branches are close to the ground. So you trim off those branches, separate the trees, thin them out, shave off the branches, cut off the branches, and suddenly you have a forest that is much more resilient.

There are those folks who have said: Let's just get rid of the environmental rules. Let's just clearcut everything. Let's do 10,000 acres at a time. That is, by the way, 15 square miles. Let's set those 15 square miles next to each other. Let's just shave the Earth and wipe out the forests. That way, there will not be forest fires. Those are the timber wars of the past.

What we have seen is that we can bridge the divide between a good ecosystem and a good timber stand by thinning the forest, by making them more like a natural forest, which is much more fire resilient. In the process of thinning, which has to be done periodically over time, we are also providing a steady foundation for sawlogs for our mills.

There is a mill in John Day, OR. I met with the folks there who were very worried. The workers there were very worried about that mill getting shut down. I was determined to do everything I could to save that mill. What ended up happening is that we found we couldn't save that mill with a timber sale because a timber sale can't commit to a load of logs over a 10-year period. The owner of the mill couldn't commit to the cost of new machinery if he didn't know he would get logs for an extended period of time. So we discovered that we could, though, through a forest health contract—through a stewardship contract—enable a steady supply of thinned logs to make it to that mill and make sure that mill stayed open. Not only did it keep it open, but it added workers to that mill. That is the type of win-win solution that we need.

There is another way of looking at the cost of fighting fires. Here we see, in 1995, 16 percent of the budget going to fight fires; in 2017, 56 percent. Let's look into the future. An original estimate was that we would reach 67 percent by 2025; now the new estimate, based on the changing dynamics in the forest, is that we will get to over two-thirds of the budget fighting fires by the year 2021—four fire seasons from today. That is how big the issue is. That is why we need funds from the front end to be able to thin these forests. This is simply common sense.

If you are the private owner of a private forest, you wouldn't dare let this forest retain this high propensity for fires and disease. You would thin the forest. You would make it a better timber stand; you would make it a better ecosystem. And that is what we need to do.

We have also seen that another way of looking at the changes is how the staffing levels have changed over the last two decades. If we look at just two decades ago, we can see that in 1998 there were about 18,000 individuals dedicated to managing the forest lands and just 5,700 dedicated to going out and fighting blazes. Now we have come into the future, and we see now that the number of people fighting fires is larger than the number working on all of the other forest programs. We have to commit to doing far more on the prevention end. If we let this summer's crisis go without securing funding to thin those forests that have already gone through the environmental process, we are making a huge mistake, and it is going to cost us more because there are going to be even more fires in the future. So not only do we spend

more out of the National Treasury to fight them, but we will have less healthy timber stands to fuel our economy.

Let's end the fire burn. Let's provide the funding to restore the fire service assets that were burned, the scoured assets. Let's provide assistance through community development block grants and small business loans to assist the communities that were scoured by these fires. Let's pass Senator WYDEN and Senator CRAPO's bill, which proceeds to create a FEMA-like structure to back up the worst fire seasons, and certainly, certainly, absolutely, let's invest in prevention on the front end by thinning these forests and getting the flammable buildup of forest branches off the floor of the forests. Those are positive things we can do.

At this moment in Houston, in Miami, in Puerto Rico, people are thinking, what can we do to better prepare for the next storm surge? What can we do to be better prepared for the next hurricane? Well, we know for sure that we are going to have fires across the Northwest in Montana, in Idaho, in Oregon, in Washington every summer, and they are simply getting worse. We must ask ourselves the same question: How do we change this rhythm? How do we operate this differently and better? That is our responsibility in this Chamber, and that is the set of things we can do to have a far better outcome in the future.

I urge all of my colleagues to support these five efforts as we support funding for Texas and Florida and Puerto Rico. Thank you.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BLUNT). The majority leader is recognized.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGREEMENT—EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that following leader remarks on Tuesday, October 17, the Senate proceed to the consideration of Calendar No. 191, the nomination of David Trachtenberg to be Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense. I further ask that there be 10 minutes of debate on the nomination equally divided in the usual form; that following the use or yielding back of time, the Senate vote on confirmation with no intervening action or debate; that if confirmed, the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table, and the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the en bloc consideration of the following nominations: Executive Calendar Nos. 327, 332, 333, and 337.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The clerk will report the nominations en bloc.

The legislative clerk read the nominations of Stephen B. King, of Wisconsin, to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the Czech Republic; BARBARA LEE, of California, to be Representative of the United States of America to the Seventy-second Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations; CHRISTOPHER SMITH, of New Jersey, to be Representative of the United States of America to the Seventy-second Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations; and J. Steven Dowd, of Florida, to be United States Director of the African Development Bank for a term of five years.

Thereupon, the Senate proceeded to consider the nominations en bloc.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate vote on the nominations en bloc with no intervening action or debate; that if confirmed, the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table en bloc; that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action; that no further motions be in order; and that any statements relating to the nominations be printed in the RECORD.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Is there any further debate on the nominations en bloc?

If not, the question is, will the Senate advise and consent to the King, Lee, Smith, and Dowd nominations en bloc?

The nominations were confirmed en bloc.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the en bloc consideration of the following nominations: Executive Calendar Nos. 365, 366, and 367.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The clerk will report the nominations en bloc.

The legislative clerk read the nominations of Timothy Gallaudet, of California, to be Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere; Howard R. Elliott, of Indiana, to be Administrator of the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration. Department of Transportation and Walter G. Copan, of Colorado, to be Under Secretary of Commerce for Standards and Technology.

Thereupon, the Senate proceeded to consider the nominations en bloc.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate vote on the nominations en bloc with no intervening action or debate; that if confirmed, the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table en bloc; that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action; that no further motions be in order; and that any statements relating to the nominations be printed in the RECORD.